

D&D Fiction

The Eyes of Gith

by James Wyatt



They were nearby -- Kejira could smell them.

A grim smile tugged one corner of the warrior's mouth. She remembered a time when any creature of evil gave her that warning scent -- a burning stench like the echo of brimstone from some nether plane. That was before.

Now, it was only the githyanki that rankled in her nostrils. But she said she could smell them a mile away, and it might not have been boasting. More than once, she'd been ready to meet them, her sword in her hand, when they stepped out of the Astral to attack her.

Yes, she had lost her unerring sense for the reek of evil. She had lost the holy power that used to flow through her arm and her sword and her heart to smite the servants of evil. She had lost much that she used to rely on.

She had lost Paulon, her oathmate of ten years and ten dozen adventures.

And in return she had gained -- what? She spat silently, only vaguely noticing the blood that spattered onto the cold stone at her feet.

She had gained a hatred so strong it seemed to flow in her veins like holy power once had. She had gained a thirst for vengeance that would never be quenched. She had gained a fury like the whirling blade of an erinyes, that made even the brutal githyanki quail when she howled her rage at them and began cutting them down.

She had gained a hatred that was eating her from the inside.

Kejira crept forward, ears straining for any sound. She held her sword in her right hand as she moved, and her eyes absently noted the baroque carvings that lined the tunnel wall. She doubted the githyanki had built this underground fortress, but they had certainly made it theirs. The images passed by the corners of her eyes, only occasionally making an impression -- they were familiar subjects, depicting the githyanki's revolt against their mind flayer masters in scenes of fierce brutality.

She stopped suddenly. One relief stood out from the others: a richly detailed depiction of Gith, the warrior who led the revolt. Kejira had never seen githyanki art like that before. Most was flat, stylized, but not this. Gith looked like a real woman, down to every detail of her battle-scarred armor.

It was the eyes that caught Kejira's attention, though. They burned with hatred, with the violent passion that fueled the revolution. For a long moment Kejira lost herself staring into those eyes.



She clenched her sword tightly in both hands before she realized why she was doing it. The githyanki appeared on either side, two and two, stepping out of the air a few feet away from her and hurtling forward, their silver swords gleaming in the light of Kejira's lantern. Kejira brought her sword down toward the head of the nearest one, but he deflected her blade. She grimaced. Her blow would have cut a lesser warrior in half. She was in for a real fight this time.

Even as she whirled around, parrying four silver swords in an intricate dance of steel, two more githyanki appeared behind the first wave -- blackweave warlocks, Kejira guessed. The casters were necromancers who would support the knights with their vile spells. Her pulse began to quicken, even as she cut down one knight and hurled his bleeding body toward one of the spellcasters.

The rage exploded in her head, surged into her muscles, and burst forth from her mouth in a wordless scream. All the githyanki were visibly shaken -- the nearest ones took a step back, and Kejira pressed that advantage, cutting them both down in quick succession. Only one knight remained now, and he circled warily as the two warlocks hurled bolts of crackling purple-black darkness at Kejira.

The darkness gnawed at her body and soul, sending a wave of emptiness and despair through her body. As she threw her head back in pain, her eyes fixed for an instant on Gith's eyes again, and she felt her rage surge in her once more, fighting back the darkness. She shouted a few words of magic -- words that would have defiled her ears when she still clung to the virtues of paladinhood -- giving voice to her despair and placing it like a heavy load on the backs of her opponents. She could see them sag under the weight of it, and she smiled.

The knight was making his approach now, and Kejira ran to intercept him. She lowered her head and drove her shoulder into his gut, knocking the wind out of him and lifting him off the ground, slamming him into the wall beside Gith. She stepped back and drove the point of her sword into his chest until it clanked against stone.

"Gath-kaa du'shakhut ka-Gith'shaj," one of the warlocks hissed, his eyes wide. Kejira had never studied the language of her sworn foes, but something in the warlock's face conveyed the import of his words. She shot a glare at the warlock who had spoken, then ran to the other one, slicing his throat as he tried to speak another spell.

She turned to face her last foe. He had backed away as she killed his compatriot, and stood near the edge of her lamplight. His face was shrouded in a shadow Kejira's eyes could not pierce. She held her sword straight in front of her, its point aimed at the warlock's heart.

"What did you say to me?" she demanded. "Tell me before you die on my sword."

The githyanki didn't answer, and Kejira took a step forward, the lantern suspended above her shoulder bringing its light to his face.

His eyes flicked from Kejira's face to the carving beside her.

"Tell me!" Kejira roared.

The warlock's lips moved silently for a moment, then he found his voice and began again. "You fight with the fury of Gith herself," he whispered.

Kejira lunged forward, and the last githyanki died.

Her rage refused to subside, and she whirled on the exquisite carving. "You!" she shouted, pointing her sword at Gith's heart. "The whole cursed race is your fault!" She glared at the relief as if she expected some retort, but the eyes of Gith just glared back at her, their fury a mirror of her own.

She lunged again, driving her sword point into the chest of the carving. Cold fear dampened her rage as the sword sank into the stone, pulling her in behind it. The last thing she saw before the darkness closed in on her was the carved eyes, their pupils wide with rage.

Kejira floated in a cold darkness her lantern could not light. It pressed against her skin like cold flesh. She couldn't tell whether her limbs responded to her commands to move. She tried to turn, to run, just to put her hand to her face. The darkness did not change, and neither did the constant pressure enfolding her. She began swinging her sword wildly -- or at least she tried to. She didn't know whether her limbs responded.

Kejira deGannevar. The voice might have been in her mind or in her ears, she could not tell. It was quiet but harsh, rasping, dry. It sounded like the impossible voice of a shriveled dead thing, a mummy or a lich that, by rights, should have no voice at all.

"Who are you? Show yourself!" Kejira could not hear her own voice.

How long have you hunted me, and you do not recognize me?

"Gith?" Kejira tried to spit again, and wondered if blood came from her mouth, and where it might land. "You expect me to believe that? Not even the githyanki believe you're still alive."

Some do.

A fresh wave of fear rose in Kejira's throat. She knew the githyanki legends of Gith: The leader of their rebellion had disappeared into the pits of Hell and never returned. In her place, a dragon-fiend had emerged to announce a pact between the githyanki and red dragonkind. Most githyanki assumed that the pact had been sealed with Gith's lifeblood, but a few believed that she survived and would someday return to lead her people again.

So am I in Hell? Kejira thought.

Is this what Hell feels like? The soft darkness pressing against her skin transformed into razor-sharp blades, and Kejira screamed. She felt as though her body were one great wound, as if blood were leaking from every pore, as if she had turned to pain.

She had no idea how long it lasted. She screamed and screamed without ever pausing to draw breath. She thought she must die, but death never came. An eternity of torment passed, and then it was gone. Her nerves tingled with the memory of it, rebelling at the renewed touch of the soft, chill darkness.

Then a blast of fire shattered the darkness. Kejira's senses registered the light an instant before the pain, and the face of Gith was burned into her eyes even as the flames seared her flesh. It took a second for Kejira to realize that the face she had seen was the carving on the wall, not a living Gith somewhere in the Hells -- and with that realization came a long-delayed awareness of the danger she was in. She fumbled at her belt for a sunrod and

sparked it to life, even as a githyanki sword bit deep into her shoulder.

She was in the tunnel, crumpled on the floor before the carving. Had she ever left? Her lantern had gone out, and her greatsword lay shattered at Gith's stone feet. She was covered in blood from countless wounds -- not, it seemed, the cuts of a million tiny razors, but a few blows well-placed while she was apparently helpless to defend herself. Her skin and gear were scorched, but she was not dead yet.

The light of her sunrod revealed another half-dozen githyanki ranged around her: four knights standing close, two or three spellcasters hanging back out of reach. She snatched the hilt of her broken blade from the floor and leapt to her feet, mumbling a prayer to any god that might still listen to her that she had not regained her senses too late. The githyanki seemed taken aback by her sudden coming to life, stumbling backward in surprise and perhaps a hint of fear.

Kejira glanced down at the shattered sword in her hand. First things first, she thought. Leaping suddenly at the nearest knight, she drew the broken blade across his throat and snatched his silver sword from his grasp as he fell. To her surprise, she felt it flow in her hands, balancing itself against her swings -- just the way it had when its githyanki master had wielded it. She had no time to question this unexpected good fortune, though. The other three knights hurtled forward in outrage at her presumption. The githyanki considered their silver swords a sacred trust, Kejira knew, and would not tolerate her wielding one against them.

"Try and stop me," she muttered as she cut the three knights down. The silver sword practically sang in her hands. The spellcasters hurled fire and black lightning at her, but she shrugged their feeble spells off, closing with each one in turn until all her foes were dead.

She stood over the body of the last to fall as he looked up at her, his strength ebbing out onto the floor. His voice was the faintest whisper, but Kejira heard every syllable as clearly as she had heard the voice of Gith in her mind.

"Danaav'ae-kaa an-talman'ukha."

Kejira drove the silver sword deep into the warlock's bony chest, then threw her head back and let out a long wail of rage and grief. Kicking the body of the githyanki warlock aside, she dropped to her knees where it had lain, clutching the captured silver sword to her breast.

The eyes of Gith looked down on her with contempt, mirroring Kejira's rage. But their stone showed nothing of her pain, the grief that cut far worse than a million razors or a thousand silver swords. For she understood the warlock's dying words, far worse than any imprecation:

"You have become one of us."

-- Kejira deGannevar is introduced on page 92 of *Heroes of Horror*:

Kejira deGannevar CR 15

Female human ex-paladin 6/corrupt avenger 9

LN Medium humanoid

Init -1; **Senses** Listen +2, Spot +2

Languages Common

AC 18, touch 10, flat-footed 18

hp 126 (15 HD)

Immune fear

Fort +12, **Ref** +6, **Will** +9

Weakness must reroll concealment, miss if either roll misses; dazed for first round of combat if surprised; frightened by dragons (Will save, DC 14 + dragon's CR, to resist)

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares)

Melee +2 *extraplanar humanoid bane greatsword* +22/+17/+12 (2d6+8/17-20) or

Ranged +2 *composite longbow* +16/+11/+6 (1d8+6/x3)

Base Atk +15; **Grp** +19

Atk Options sworn foe (githyanki) +8, unnerving fury, tainted strike 4/day (+4 damage), Cleave, Great Cleave, Debilitating Strike (melee attack deal 2 points of Con damage, 4/day), Point Blank Shot, Power Attack, Precise Shot, Surge of Malevolence (+9 on attack roll, save, or check, 1/day), Tainted Fury (+30 hp, gain 1 tainted smite [+15 damage], 30 rd., 1/day)

Special Actions lay on hands 30 hp, 1/day

Combat Gear *arrow of extraplanar humanoid slaying, potion of cure moderate wounds*

Corrupt Avenger Spells Prepared (CL 9th):

4th--*crushing despair* (DC 15), *enervation* (+14 ranged touch), *freedom of movement*, *pronouncement of fate** (DC 15)

3rd--*bestow curse* (DC 14), *discern lies* (DC 14), *dispel magic*, *haste*, *protection from energy*

2nd--*bear's endurance*, *bull's strength*, *death knell* (DC 13), *resist energy*, *undetectable alignment*, *vampiric touch* (+19 melee touch)

1st--*cause fear* (DC 16), *detect magic*, *detect taint**, *detect undead*, *doom* (DC 16), *resistance*

* New spells described later in *Heroes of Horror* chapter 5

Abilities Str 18, Dex 9, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 14, Cha 12

Corruption 30 (severe), **Depravity** 17 (moderate)

SQ corruption symptoms (internal corruption, chronic illness, dead eye), depravity symptoms (moderate phobia [dragons], disoriented), taint suppression

Feats Cleave, Debilitating Strike*, Great Cleave, Improved Critical, Point Blank Shot, Power Attack, Precise Shot, Surge of Malevolence*, Tainted Fury*, Weapon Focus (greatsword)

* New feats described later in *Heroes of Horror* chapter 5

Skills Concentration +20, Diplomacy +21, Ride +3, Sense Motive +16

Possessions combat gear plus +2 *mithral breastplate*, +2 *extraplanar humanoid bane greatsword*, *belt of giant strength* +4, *ring of protection* +1, +2 *composite longbow* (+4 Str bonus) with 20 arrows, *amulet of natural armor* +1, *cloak of resistance* +1

Spellbook prepared spells plus 4th--*death ward*, *phantasmal killer*; 3rd--*slow*, *speak with dead*; 2nd--*false life*; 1st--*read magic*

Sworn Foe against githyanki, Kejira gains a +8 bonus on Bluff, Listen, Sense Motive, Spot, and Survival checks.

She can detect sworn foes within 60 feet at will. Whenever she faces githyanki in combat, she adds +2

to her Strength and Constitution scores for 30 rounds. At the end of her fury, her corruption score increases by 1 if she fails her Fortitude save. While she is in this fury, opponents within 30 ft. must succeed on a DC 20 Will save or become unnerved (-4 penalty to attacks, saves, and checks).

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